



Wandering & Wondering John Maybury

BLACK SHEEP

“Black sheep” used to mean a good thing. But now it means a disgraced or disreputable person. A British website called “A Phrase a Week” (phrases.org.uk) explores this conundrum: “It may also be because shepherds disliked black sheep as their fleeces weren’t suitable for dyeing and so were worth less than those of white sheep. In fact, it is more likely to have derived from a bit of misinterpretation by the writers of early English Bibles...The first record of ‘black sheep’ in a derogatory sense that I can find in print is from an English Puritan who emigrated to America in 1635, the appropriately named Thomas Shepard, in the evangelical text *The Sincere Convert*, 1640... Meanwhile, back in England, black sheep maintained the same status as black cats. The long-standing English country tradition that black sheep are omens of good fortune remained until the 19th century...Baa, Baa, Black Sheep is one of the oldest English nursery rhymes and was first printed in Tommy Thumb’s *Pretty Song Book*, circa 1744... Like most nursery rhymes, the interpretation of the text is a source of debate... If there is a negative connotation it is that the rhyme may refer to the unpopular export tax on wool imposed in 1275. That country lore was overtaken by the figurative use of the ‘black sheep’ that we now commonly use.”

LIPSTICK ON A PIG

Caltrans window dressing, i.e., calling Highway 1 widening the Calera Parkway Project, is pure Potemkin Village propaganda. It’s vintage Caltrans, an iron fist in a velvet glove, steamrolling a hapless city with an impotent staff and council while spoon-feeding bland euphemisms to an impressionable public. For historical reference, read about how Caltrans plowed the Foothill Freeway (Interstate 210) right through the heart of Pasadena, dividing the community, much as it did to Sharp Park when it dug the trench for Highway 1. (Info: PHwy1A@gmail.com)

INNER EDIROT

A free weekly e-newsletter of linguistic curiosities (worldwide-words.org) has a column called “Sic!” that recently posted this blooper from an article in *The Independent* (August 12) about the Australian general election: “On the campaign trail and addressing a Liberal Party event in the city of Melbourne [opposition leader Tony] Abbott said: ‘No one -- however smart, however well-educated, however experienced -- is the suppository of all wisdom.’”

SHOPAHOLICS

Oniomania (compulsive shopping) is a one-way ticket to financial disaster, according to a *Queendom.com* study, which found that people who own several credit cards may be at a greater

risk of becoming shopaholics. The main pitfall is believing that “retail therapy” will help you feel better about yourself, but the rebound effect from overspending can be terrible. Just as with any addiction, the shopping addict keeps doing the addictive behavior (shopping), hoping it will make things better, but all it does is accelerate the downward spiral of debt and despair. *Queendom’s* research showed that shopaholics use shopping to cope with stress or trauma or low self-esteem, are more impulsive and undisciplined than people with fewer credit cards, and to get an adrenaline rush from being fashion-forward and free spending. *Queendom* advises shopaholics to get help before credit card bills come in, creditors start nagging, utilities get disconnected, and relationships break down. “If you’re spending more money than you have and most of it goes to shopping for things other than basic needs, you need to step back and give yourself a reality check before you ruin your credit and your life,” says *Queendom*, advising shopaholics to keep shopping habits under control: If already in serious debt, seek guidance from a financial advisor and a therapist. Get rid of credit and debit cards. Resist impulses to make immediate purchases; buyer’s remorse exists for a reason. Treat yourself to something special only when it’s well deserved or needed, not just to shop for shopping’s sake. Get a hobby other than shopping. Go shopping with a friend who can help you control your impulse buys. Be especially wary of online shopping; it puts too much temptation in your way.

LET’S GET SMALL

Along with downsizing or disappearing common, everyday items like grocery bags, post offices, and landlines, Scott McKellar notes the rising popularity (up 89 percent over last year in California) of little Ford Fiestas. But Scott says that Burlingame still has a lot of Hummers.

STEVE MACKAY & THIRD THURSDAY

Steve Mackay appears at the legendary Winters Tavern with *Third Thursday* on Saturday, August 31 from 9 p.m. on. Classic and obscure cover tunes from the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s.

LIGHTNING BOLT

Scott McKellar says that a friend of his headed home last week during our big thunderstorm, and blew through the red light at Fassler and Highway 1, then suddenly stopped because of a bright flash. He thought a traffic camera had taken his picture making a “California stop” at the signal. In fact, it was just a lightning bolt right off the coast. Nervously, he drove into the Shell gas station on the corner and asked the clerk if there was a traffic camera there. The clerk said, “No camera here.” The grateful driver bought three gallons of gas, then drove home **VERY CAREFULLY**.

SWAMI SEZ

“Nowadays, skin graft recipients run a risk of getting hand-me-down tattoos.” (Dolores De Cabeza)

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